

the guardian weekly

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Level » Advanced

Style » Individual or group activities



Welcome to the Guardian Weekly's special news-based materials to support learners and teachers of English. Each month, the Guardian Weekly newspaper selects topical news articles that can be used to practise English language skills. The materials are graded for two levels: Advanced and Lower Intermediate. These worksheets can be downloaded free from guardian.co.uk/weekly/. You can also find more advice for teachers and learners from the Guardian Weekly's Learning English section on the site.

Materials prepared by Janet Hardy-Gould

Boy of 14 could be youngest professional conductor



José Ángel Salazar, right, leads his musicians Orchestra Nueva Esparta

Before reading

- 1 The article is about a young person who is unusually skilful for his age. Work in groups and think of famous people who showed great talent when young.

For example: **art** Picasso started to paint formal pictures from an early age.

- a** music
- b** sport
- c** maths or science

Share your ideas with the class.

- 2 Look at the headline, photo and caption of the article. Underline the adjectives below that you think will be used to describe José Ángel Salazar in the text.

- a** youthful
- b** ageing
- c** boyish
- d** middle-aged
- e** retired
- f** fresh-faced
- g** senior

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Article

Boy of 14 could be youngest professional conductor

- 1 For a professional conductor, José Ángel Salazar has a fresh-faced, youthful demeanour: he is quite short, with large hands, a narrow frame and a face framed by a mass of dark curls. But if Salazar looks boyish then it's because he is in fact a boy. At 14, and recently appointed to direct a Venezuelan youth orchestra, he may well be the youngest conductor in the world.
- 2 Salazar has up to 80 musicians in the Youth Orchestra of Nueva Esparta at his command, of whom more than half are older than he is.
- 3 "I've been invited to conduct other orchestras that are made up of adults and it's easier," he said. The shift in role, from friend and peer to leader, is a challenge Salazar must overcome not only for his own sake, but for that of the orchestra.
- 4 "Conducting is a wordless language. I have to convey confidence to the musicians in order to get a confident performance back from them ... I have to co-ordinate my body's movements with the music," he said.
- 5 But despite articulating feelings with a maturity that seems well beyond his years, Salazar can find his job daunting. "It's hard because I have to find the way to communicate, or sometimes tell off kids who are much older than me," he said.
- 6 Along with Los Angeles Philharmonic conductor Gustavo Dudamel and Edicson Ruiz, who at 17 became the youngest musician to join the Berlin Philharmonic, Salazar is one of the success stories to come out of the Venezuelan orchestra system known as El Sistema.
- 7 El Sistema was masterminded 37 years ago by José Antonio Abreu, a retired economist and musician whose aim was to give children a route out of poverty through music. Today there are more than

285 child and youth orchestras in Venezuela.

- 8 Salazar was eight when he joined El Sistema. The son of schoolteachers, neither he nor anyone in his family had much exposure to classical music, let alone formal music training.
- 9 "I went to a brass concert with my dad and grandfather and I cried three times," he said. While most children his age would have wept from boredom, Salazar said he felt enraptured. He dropped karate lessons and started learning the flute.
- 10 His favourite composer is Schubert. "Certain pieces make me feel like I must surrender ... I get goosebumps from just hearing the first three notes of Schubert's 5th," he said.

Virginia Lopez Caracas

Glossary

demeanour (noun) the way that someone looks or behaves

shift (noun) a change

peer (noun) a person who is the same age or social status as you

daunting (adjective) when something makes you feel worried because you think it will be very difficult or dangerous

mastermind (verb) to plan and direct a complicated project

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While reading

1 Read the article. Write Yes [Y] or No [N] next to these statements. Underline the relevant information in the text.

José Ángel Salazar ...

- a is slim with curly hair.
- b is the conductor of the Venezuelan National Orchestra.
- c finds it more difficult to conduct adults than children.
- d talks about feelings in a mature way.
- e finds his job easy and straightforward.
- f is the product of a scheme called El Sistema.
- g comes from a classical music background.
- h found his first classical concert an emotional experience.
- i has a passion for Schubert.

2 Read again. Answer these questions.

a How do the musicians in the youth orchestra compare in age to Salazar?

b Why is it sometimes difficult for Salazar to conduct other young people?

c How does Salazar describe conducting?

d What does Salazar need to get across to his musicians? Why?

e Which other successful young people have been produced by El Sistema?

f Why was El Sistema originally created?

g What did Salazar do after his first classical concert?

h What is Salazar's reaction to Schubert's 5th symphony?

After reading

1 Look at these examples of the passive from the article.

"I've been invited to conduct other orchestras that are made up of adults ..." (paragraph 3)

El Sistema was masterminded 37 years ago by José Antonio Abreu ... (para 7)

Complete the text below with the active or passive of the verbs in brackets. Use the present simple, past simple or the present perfect.

El Sistema (a) _____ (found) in 1975 by the economist and musician José Antonio Abreu. He (b) _____ (want) to create an organisation to help children out of poverty. At first the scheme (c) _____ (call) Social Action for Music. Since the 1970s El Sistema (d) _____ (grow) significantly and today its music schools (e) _____ (attend) by around 370,000 children across Venezuela.

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Between 70% and 90% of these students

(f) (come) from poorer backgrounds.

Over the years the idea

(g) (admire) by many famous musicians and nowadays El Sistema

(h) (know) in musical circles across the world. In recent years, similar organisations (i) (set up) in a number of countries including the US.

2 Word building

Fill in the gaps with nouns related to these adjectives.

confident

a

poor

b

mature

c

successful

d

exposed

e

bored

f

3 Use the nouns from exercise 2 to complete the sentences below.

a Many of the children who join El Sistema have had no to classical music.

b Students soon learn to be interested in the music and lose any sense of .

c In order to be a young musical conductor, you need a lot of self-.

d Training in classical music can help some deprived children out of .

e Abreu's idea has been a huge and it has been copied by other countries.

f Salazar has a level of that his beyond his years.

Activity - class interview

a As a class, brainstorm the advantages and disadvantages of being a prodigy.

b Ask a volunteer to play Salazar. He/she reads the article again and makes notes about his personality, background etc.

c The other students in pairs write interview questions to ask Salazar using "you".

d As a class, the students take it in turns to question Salazar who replies with "I".

e Using reported speech, recap as a class what Salazar said. Students make notes.

f Homework: students write an article about Salazar using the interview.

Answers

Before reading

2 a, c, f

While reading

1 a Y b N c N d Y e N f Y g N h Y i Y

2 a More than half of them are older than he is.

b He has to shift his role from friend to leader. He also has to tell off children older than him.

c As a wordless language.

d Confidence. So that he can get a confident performance back from them.

e Gustavo Dudamel and Edicson Ruiz.

f To help children out of poverty through music.

g He stopped karate lessons and started learning the flute.

h He gets goosebumps.

After reading

1 a was founded b wanted c was called d has grown e are attended f come g has been admired h is known i have been set up

2 a confidence b poverty c maturity d success e exposure f boredom

3 a exposure b boredom c confidence d poverty e success f maturity